

Friday's Feature
By
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October tips for the Northwest Florida garden and landscape

October marks the start of Florida's dry season. The big tropical storms are less of a threat and the afternoon rains begin to lessen. Autumn is on its way and cooler, dryer weather is just around the corner. Because of the nice weather, October is a great time to work in your landscape and garden.

October is a good time to prepare beds for the cool season flowers. As temperatures drop, plant calendulas, dianthus, flowering cabbage and kale, mums, pansies, petunias, Shasta daisies and snapdragons.

Planting pansies will ensure a colorful fall garden; however, avoid planting them while the weather is warm. Also, be careful when fertilizing flowering kale and cabbage. Excess nitrogen can make them more susceptible to cold damage.

Just about all of the cool season vegetables can be successfully started in the garden during October. Most grow and produce better when planted now, rather than planted in the spring. You can plant seeds of beets, carrots, kale, kohlrabi, leek, mustard, parsley, radish, spinach and turnips. You can also obtain young plants and establish broccoli, cabbage, collards, onions and strawberries.



Lion's ear is a fall blooming perennial that makes a great addition to any garden

The recommended planting time for strawberries might seem odd to gardeners who are from other regions. In Florida, we must use day-neutral or short-day varieties and plant them from early October through the middle of November. They grow vegetatively during the winter and produce berries from early March until early June.

Varieties of strawberries that produce well under our conditions include Camarosa, Sweet Charlie, Oso Grande and Chandler. Set plants twelve inches apart in prepared beds or plant them in planters, barrels or in "strawberry jars."

Strawberry plants should be destroyed after harvest and replaced with new plants each fall. They are not grown as perennials here in Northwest Florida

because of disease issues. Anthracnose fungus builds up under our environmental conditions, and will eventually cause the plant to decline and fail.

Finally after months of rapid growth, lawn grasses are gradually slowing down and will eventually go dormant with the shorter days and cooler temperatures. Allow this natural process to occur by withholding high nitrogen containing fertilizers. Encouraging growth this late in the season will increase the risk of your grass being killed by harsh winter temperatures.

Overseeding of the permanent lawn with annual ryegrass can be done during late October and early November. Though a well kept cool season lawn can be attractive, it requires a commitment. Regular mowing, irrigation and a couple of light, supplemental applications of fertilizer will be required during the winter in order to keep the lawn looking its best.

Tip of the Week: October is the month that most pine trees shed their needles. Pine needles make excellent mulch for flower, vegetable and shrub beds. Pine needles can be used alone as a mulch or in combination with other organic materials. Pine needles are attractive, not easily removed from beds by wind or rain, and don't "mat down" excessively. However, they don't last very long due to rapid decomposition.

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